

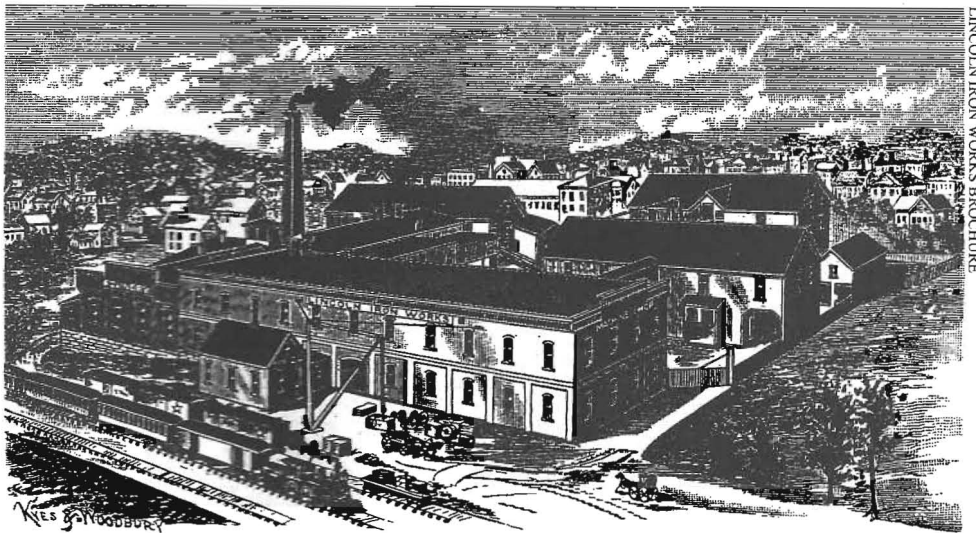
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The Story Of Lincoln Iron Works



An undated Kyes and Woodbury drawing of the Lincoln Iron Works with horses and locomotive shows a busy scene, with building extensions and a second-story bridge between the machine shop and the building behind it to the north. The Lincoln Iron Works was located on the north side of West Street in Rutland, Vermont.

About the Author

JACK CROWTHER PHOTO



A resident of Rutland City since 1968, Jack Crowther worked as a news clerk, reporter, editor and columnist at the Rutland Herald for 22 years. He worked at Central Vermont Public Service Corp. in customer service and customer communications for 10 years and ran a business writing service for four years. He retired in 2004.

He has been secretary of Chapter 1, Vietnam Veterans of America, for about 15 years and has been active in the Wild Woods Music

Co-op, a local folk music group, for a similar period. He is married to Susan Crowther. They have two children and three grandchildren.

Introduction

As shoppers browse the produce of area farmers and admire the work of local crafters at the Rutland Winter Farmers Market, ghosts of the past stand quietly by.

Conversations may swirl on the virtues of buying local food and growing it organically. But a century and more ago one would have seen and heard much different sights and sounds at this spot on West Street near downtown where the railroad tracks cross.

Gone now are the days when mechanical inventiveness gained a man an honored place in the community, when the steelworkers union fought for pennies an hour on the wage scale, and when horses and steam locomotives worked side by side to deliver materials and ship finished goods.

Not much of the old Lincoln Iron Works remains; but walls, fences, scattered pieces of slag, and at least five buildings testify to its former life.

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The Story Of Lincoln Iron Works

By Jack Crowther

A Man of 'Energy and Mechanical Genius'

Lincoln Iron Works was founded by Thomas Ross in 1868, according to the evidence most persuasive to this writer. It is likely that Ross was born in Vergennes about 1834. His father, William, had a machine shop there on Water Street. Birth records in Vergennes begin in 1856, so this can't be confirmed.

With Frank Strong of Vergennes, Ross had invented the Howe Scale, the same Howe Scale that spawned a major Rutland business. (Howe was a Brandon man who acquired the 1856 patent from Strong and Ross, who sold their interest in 1864.)

Various sources, including the company's own advertisements and stationery, date the Lincoln Iron Works to 1864. It seems likely, however, that the correct date is 1868, for the following reasons:

The 1886 *History of Rutland County*, published by D. Mason & Co., dates the business to the fall of 1868. And Ross's obit supports that date, noting specifically that Ross had operated a foundry and machine shop in Middlebury for three years, starting in 1865. Records at the Henry Sheldon Museum in Middlebury note his presence there about that time, his operation of a machine shop with L. Walker, and his membership in the Congregational Church in Middlebury, again during that time period.

In any case, Ross began a partnership with his brother-in-law, C.H. Forbes, to establish the Lincoln Iron Works in Rutland. The partnership continued until 1872, when it was dissolved. Ross then continued the business.

Death in 1881 in a Shop Accident

The scarcity of information and pictures of Thomas Ross in biographical and historical sources for Vermont may be due to his early untimely death in an accident in his factory at age 46.

Ross's obit in the Jan. 6, 1881, Rutland Herald warranted nearly a column of type. The notice gave extensive details of the accident. We learn that a 10-inch emery grinding wheel spinning at 1,800 revolutions per minute flew apart, smashing Ross's skull in two places.

The Herald openly mourned the loss of one of its leading citizens. To quote: "He was gifted by nature with a remarkably clear intellect and an active brain. His mind grasped the whole of an intricate subject as by intuition. He was industrious and made the most of his opportunities."

"Mr. Ross was quite a prominent figure in town and church matters," the obituary continued. "He took an interest in all public business and was honored by public trusts." He was chairman of the Congregational Church Prudential Committee.

One can scarcely imagine a more laudatory obituary, which concluded: "In the presence of his death the community stands appalled; the town sustains a loss; every citizen mourns a friend."

Ross left a wife and five children. He was buried in Evergreen Cemetery.

His brother Crawford ran the company under the administrators of the estate for a time before a stock company took it over.

What the Lincoln Iron Works Made

Thomas Ross's obit said little about the business he left behind, simply mentioning his invention of "an improved coffee mill for which a good demand had arisen," and "several other useful articles."

THOMAS ROSS, RUTLAND, VT., Foundry and Machine Shop.

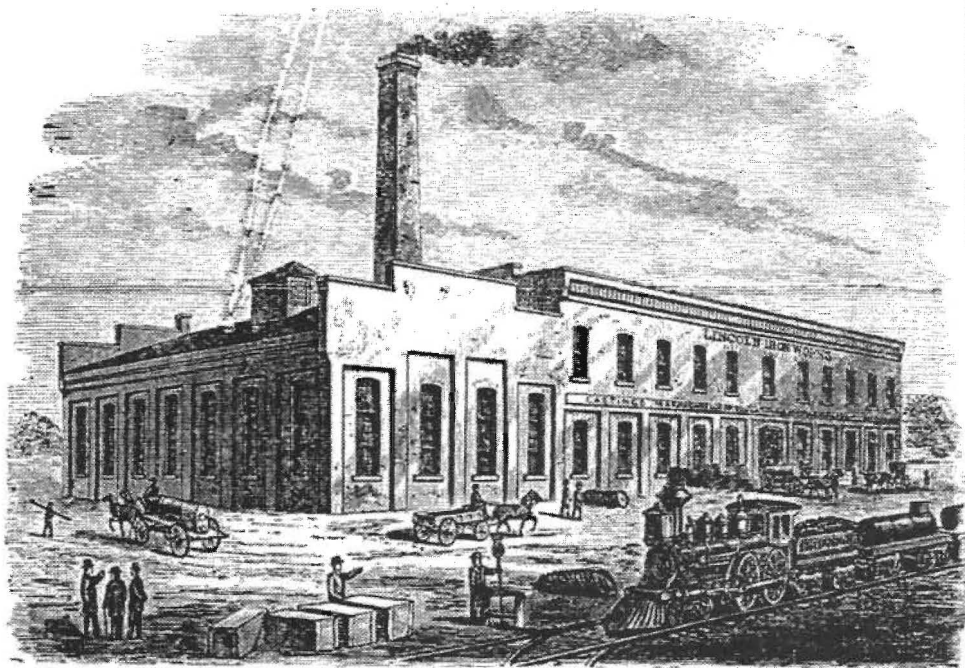
Manufacturer of the

CRESCENT COFFEE MILL.

JOB WORK DONE AT SHORT NOTICE.

Early ad for Thomas Ross's foundry in Rutland.

While the Crescent Coffee Mill got prominent play in Ross's promotional ad in the 1880-81 Rutland Directory, the business produced much more. As illustrated in the advertisement printed here, a sizeable factory was capable of turning out not only coffee mills but light and heavy castings, stone sawing machinery, derricks, shafting, pulleys, gears, wrought iron pipe and fittings, and "steel and iron rope."



LIGHT AND HEAVY CASTINGS, STONE SAWING MACHINERY,

[Merriman's Patent.]

Also, Hand and Steam Derricks and Travelers a Specialty.

**Shafting, Pulleys, Gears, etc. Wrought Iron Pipe and Fittings, Steel
and Iron Rope at Manufacturer's Prices.**

Image from Rutland Directory advertisement.

The above drawing shows a locomotive on tracks that run between the factory and West Street, as they do now. It is interesting to note that Ross chose to advertise under his own name, which obviously carried considerable weight, rather than Lincoln Iron Works. The latter name, however, is visible on the front of the building. Note that he did not use the "since 1864" tagline of ads that came after his death.

Machinery for the marble business was what the Lincoln Iron Works was all about, as confirmed by other accounts. Charles E. Crane, writing an account of the Lincoln Iron Works in the Rutland Herald in 1956, noted that Ross "erected and equipped a machine shop and iron foundry for furnishing machinery and equipment to the marble quarries and mills which were springing up at the time all along the lines of the new railroads in the Otter Creek valley from Manchester in the south to Beldens in the north . . ." (Beldens is near the University of Vermont Morgan Horse Farm. There was a Beldens Falls Marble Co. there along Otter Creek.)

Successor to Ross's Lincoln Iron Works

The importance of Lincoln Iron Works to the marble industry is glimpsed in the "History of Rutland County, Vt.," published in 1886, following Ross's death. The company had been sold in 1882, the book noted, to a stock company, and by 1886 it was reported to have "\$50,000 capital," to have doubled its capacity, and to employ 60 people.

The president of Lincoln Iron Works was now the redoubtable Redfield Proctor, who needs little introduction. Proctor is remembered as a Vermont governor, U.S. secretary of War and U.S. senator, as well as a businessman. Proctor had bought a marble mill and quarry and formed the Sutherland Falls Marble Co. He then merged it with the Rutland Marble Co. to form the Vermont Marble Co., which became the largest marble company in the world. Proctor's interest in a company producing stone working and quarrying equipment is easy to discern.

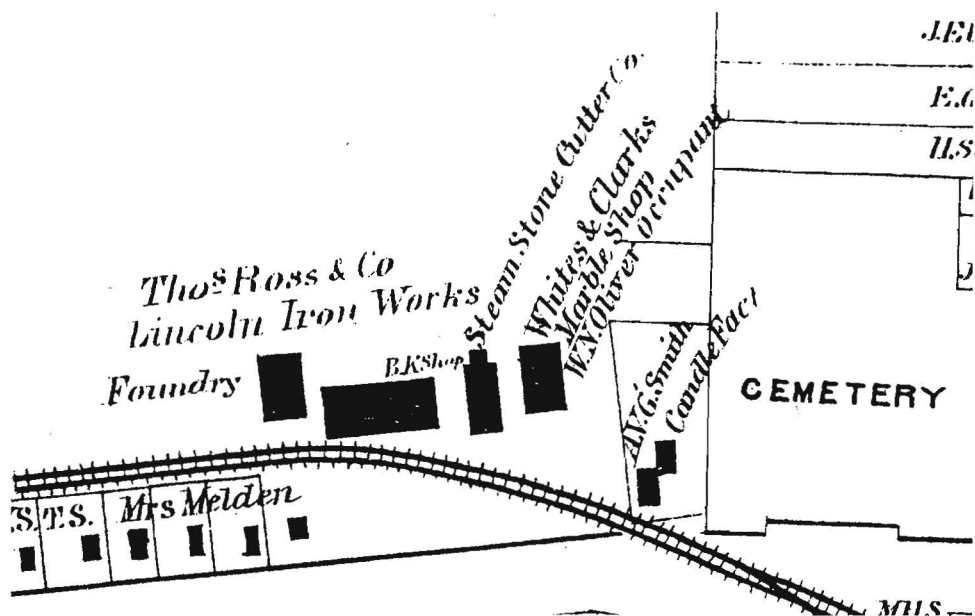
The Lincoln Iron Works Site Through the Years

Nothing remains today of the buildings that comprised the Lincoln Iron Works as it existed in 1869, a year after the company was ostensibly started in Rutland. The Atlas of Rutland County, published by F.W. Beers, A.D. Ellis and G.G. Soule of New York City and reprinted in 1969 by the Charles E. Tuttle Co. of Rutland and Tokyo gives the plant layout.

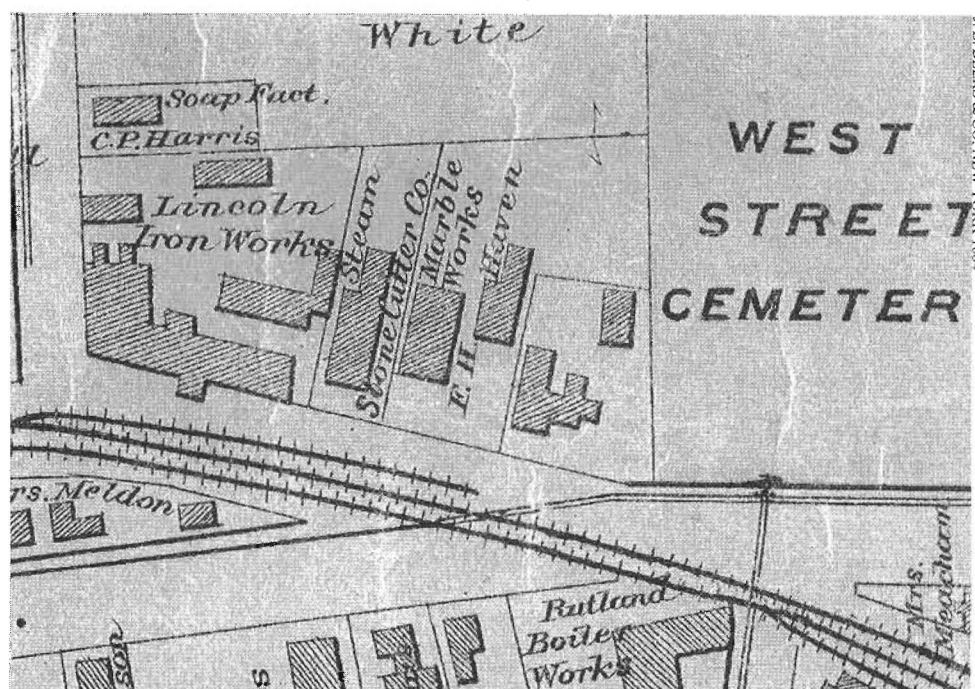
The map shows two buildings at the Lincoln Iron Works of Thos. Ross & Co. Clearly identified is the foundry. Also shown is something labeled the "B.K. Shop," which is judged to be the machine shop, the other main element of the business.

Three other buildings to the east were: (1) the Steam Stone Cutter Company, (2) White's & Clark's Marble Shop which was occupied by W.N. Oliver and (3) A.V.G. Smith's Candle Factory.

A later 1884 map of Rutland by J.L. Beers shows four buildings. In the 1884 Beers map, the foundry and machine shop are now shown as joined, while a smaller building on Baxter Street would seem to be the Crescent Coffee Mill manufactory. Behind the machine shop is an L-shaped building and an oblong building running east to west along the north line of the property.



Lincoln Iron Works layout about 1869.



Detail from the 1884 Beers Map of Rutland.



LITHOGRAPH, 1885, L. R. BURLEIGH

Lithograph, 1885, L.R. Burleigh, Troy, N.Y.

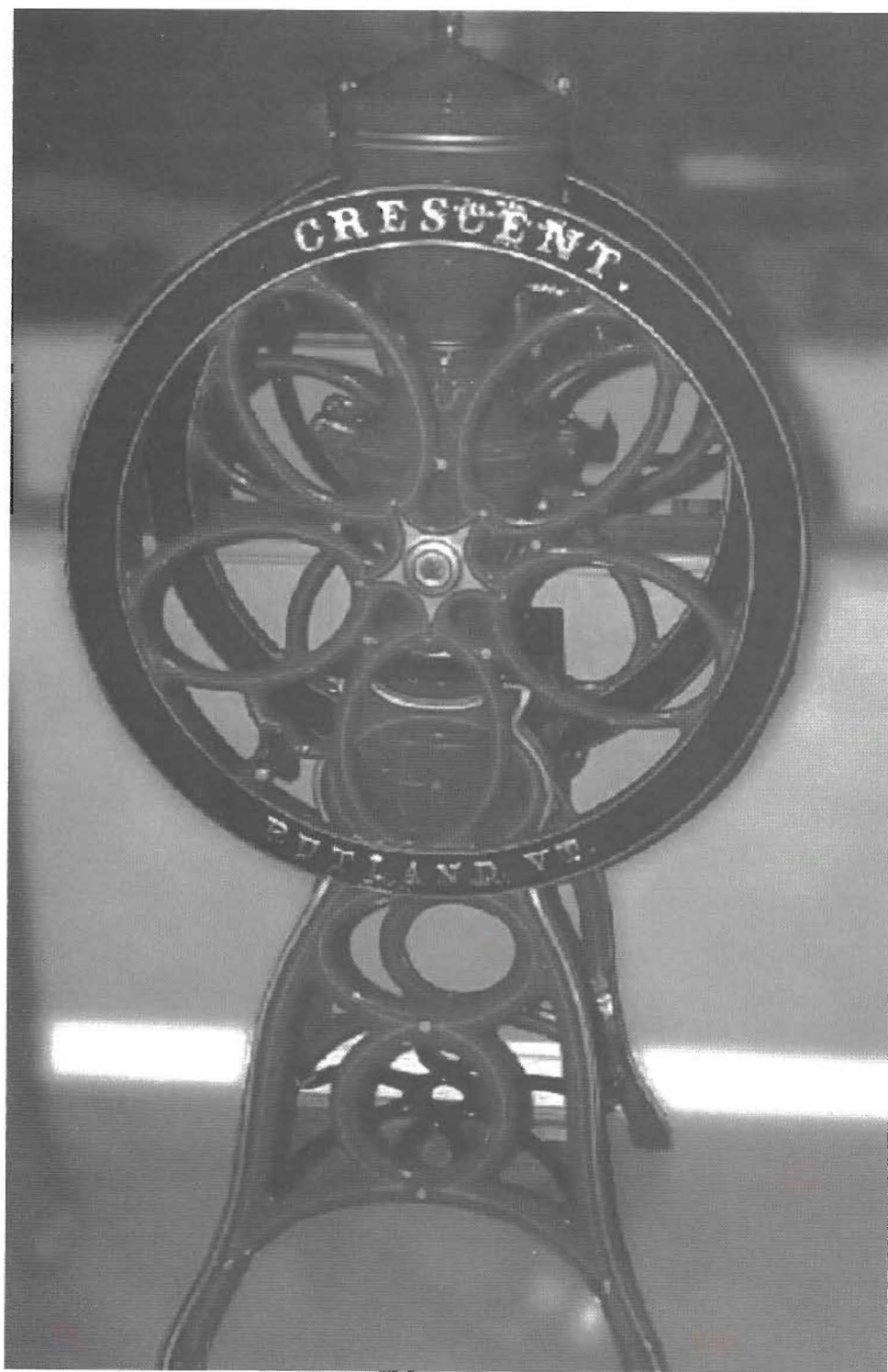
One of the best graphic depictions of the Lincoln Iron Works site from those early times can be seen in the large pictorial map above the fireplace in the Rutland Free Library's Vermont Room.

As shown in magnified form, the map pictures at least five buildings comprising the plant along West Street. With help from other sources like insurance maps, it is easy to identify the No. 38 Lincoln Iron building on the left, with its low attachment atop a retaining wall, as the foundry. The No. 38 building to the right would have been Lincoln's machine shop. The little gable-roofed building in front by the derrick was evidently an office.

The No. 39 building fronting on Baxter Street (the street is not labeled in this view) was the manufactory for the Crescent Coffee Mill. A coffee grinder might seem a rather boutiquey product, considering the heavy industrial output of the main plant. However, besides the Howe Scale, Thomas Ross had, with his brother Crawford, invented the Crescent Coffee Mill. Far from your pint-sized electric coffee pulverizer of today, the device was a serious piece of hand-cranked machinery, more suitable to a general store than a home.

A quick internet search revealed the Crescent Coffee Mill to be a highly collectible item today, fetching hundreds of dollars, perhaps more, depending on the condition. Reflecting the pride of workmanship of earlier times, the item boasted its birthplace as RUTLAND VT, cast right into the large iron wheel.

Another example of the company's imprint can be seen on storm drain covers scattered around the city bearing the name LINCOLN IRON WORKS and RUTLAND VT.



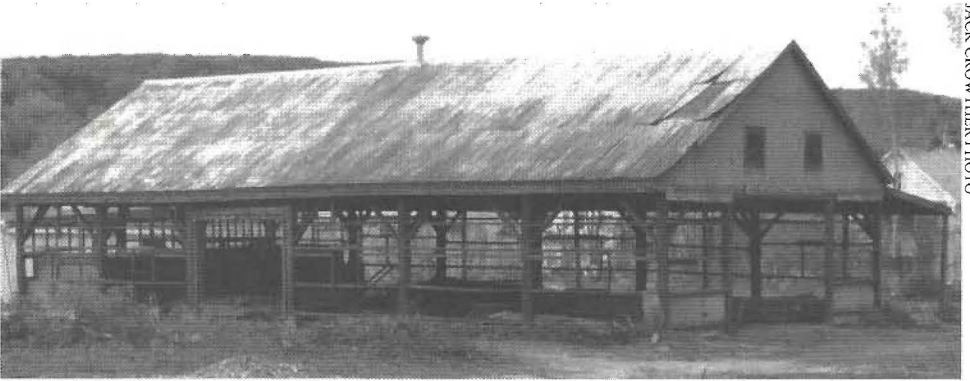
The Crescent Coffee Mill.

The oldest building standing today actually predates the Lincoln Iron Works. It is the 2½ -story blue clapboard structure, the middle building of the three that still stand along West Street.

JACK CROWTHER PHOTO



The middle building on the site predates the Lincoln Iron Works.



JACK CROWTHER PHOTO

This surviving building may have been for pattern storage.

The book *Historic Architecture of Rutland County / Rutland City*, published in 1988 by the Vermont Division of Historic Preservation, has a picture of the building, which it says was a factory built about 1865 and operated as White's Marble Works. An 1879 insurance map calls it "White and Haven's Marble Shop." A note on the map, "Dw'gs 2nd," suggests the second floor was dwelling space.

The structure later became the "Kinsman Building," derived from the Kinsman & Mills Marble & Granite Works, a complex that occupied land adjacent to the West Street Cemetery. Lincoln Iron acquired the property in 1956 and turned the building into a wholesale plumbing and heating supply operation within the Lincoln Iron Works complex.



JACK CROWTHER PHOTO

These two connected buildings date to the early 1900s.

A company blueprint insurance map of 1932 (revised in 1939) is on file at the Rutland Historical Society. There are more than 20 buildings or separate-but-attached spaces to be found there.. These include not only the foundry, machine shop and office, previously mentioned, but also a boring room, a planer room, a forge, milling shop and scale area.

A cupola room, where iron is smelted, lower foundry, tumbler and storage room, washroom, pattern storage building, lumber shed, two garages, and warehouses are also shown on the map. Three bridges connect buildings or higher ground with lower-level buildings.

Also shown on that map as falling within the Lincoln Iron complex is a structure labeled "S.S.C. Co. Bldg. Storage." That's a reference to the Steam Stone Cutter works of inventor George Wardwell. Lincoln Iron Works had acquired the plant and its products. The building is gone.



Lincoln Iron Works in the 1950s.

Thus we see that Lincoln Iron expanded eastward over the years toward a natural "dead end," namely the West Street Cemetery.

Lincoln also moved westward, as the insurance map shows a "storage yard" on the west side of Baxter Street.

A Lincoln Job, a Lincoln Home

Besides the factory site, Lincoln Iron works acquired housing in the immediate area, evidently to provide for its workers, as did the Vermont Marble Co. in Proctor and other companies of the time.

City of Rutland land records tell of sales of properties on Baxter and State streets and Cleveland Avenue from Lincoln Iron Works or Lincoln Industries (its successor company after Lincoln Iron shut down).

Reinforcing the above evidence, Michael Slattery of Killington Avenue, noted that his parents, James and Mary Ann Slattery, lived in a company house on Baxter Street in the 1930s, when James worked for Lincoln Iron.

Lincoln Iron and the Age of Industry

Rutland shared the sights and sounds of the industrial economy of the 1800s. An 1884 list of manufacturers compiled by the Rutland Historical Society includes, besides Lincoln Iron Works and its output of stone, mill and quarrying machinery: D. Shortsleeve & Co., foundry and machine shop; Mansfield & Stimson, machinery manufacturers; the Rutland Boiler Works (J.H. Holmes & Co., across the street from Lincoln Iron); J.E. Post, manufacturer of sewer and drain pipe; Steam Stone-Cutter, manufacturer of the Wardwell stone channeling machine (just next door to Lincoln Iron); Howe Scale Co., scale manufacturers; and a couple of carriage and wagon makers.

Lincoln's output was nothing to sneeze at and won recognition beyond the state's borders. For example, a 10-ton crane displayed at the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia in 1876 won a bronze medal for its "inherent and competitive merit."

At the time, Rutland's population was about 12,000 (1880 census), making it the largest city in Vermont. The state was still strongly agricultural, however. The modern myth about the state having more cows than people was actually true back then (332,000 people versus 384,000 cattle, according to the census).

The book, *200 Years of Soot and Sweat*, by Victor Rolando, describes the growth of the Lincoln Iron type of industry as follows: "In terms of numbers of operations, the ironworking industry in Vermont doubled between the 1840s and the turn of the century."

The peak year of 1896 showed 158 foundries, factories and machine shops in Vermont, Rolando states. Forty percent of the state's ironworking production was in Rutland, Windsor and Addison counties. Some of Rolando's assertions seem dubious, however, such as the statement that, "By 1909, foundries and machine shops had consolidated to 14 operations in just as many cities," clearly contradicted by the several foundries operating in Rutland at the time (i.e., Lincoln, Patch-Wegner, Howe Scale and Davis).

World War II Memory: 'It Was a Show'

Local lawyer Art Crowley vividly recalls as a teenager during World War II passing by the Lincoln Iron Works in the evening on his way home to Watkins Avenue.

America's industrial war production was going full steam around the clock to meet the needs of the U.S. and its allies. "You could hear the machinery running," Crowley recalled. He and any friends he was with would pause and take in the sights and sounds, the factory ablaze with lights. "Nobody chased us away."



Undated photo shows the Lincoln Iron Works at night.

"The whole area was lit up," Crowley remembered. "It was impressive. You could hear the sound of machinery cranking out war materiel. It was a show."

Howe Scale, where Crowley's father worked as a machinist, "was the same way," he said.

A 1956 column by Charles E. Crane in the Herald noted the war-years production included ship-building machinery and equipment and the production of asbestos cement sheets.

Crowley says Rutland's corps of skilled workers in the foundries and machine shops was "second to none," and made them readily employable elsewhere. "That's how good they were."

The Arc of the Story of the Lincoln Iron Works

In 1986, Rutland Herald Publisher Robert W. Mitchell wrote a lengthy, multi-part series entitled, "Industrial Rutland," a topic he knew better than almost anyone. He had been at the center of industrial development hereabouts for many years.

In the series he noted the arc of businesses like Lincoln Iron Works, citing the post-World War II decline and disappearance of traditional

local industries, including the Rutland Railroad, Howe Scale, Patch-Wegner and "most of the jobs generated by the Vermont Marble Co."

"Rutland industry was hard hit by the Great Depression of the 1930s," he wrote. "The Rutland Railroad went into receivership and the Vermont Marble Co. was staggered by an economic recession from which it never recovered."

Mitchell noted that Vermont Marble's machine division found purpose in war production, though wartime restrictions hurt the business as a whole. The railroad and businesses like Howe Scale, Patch-Wegner and Lincoln Iron works regained some vigor through war production. "But once the wartime subcontracting business ended, the handwriting was on the wall for Patch-Wegner and Lincoln Iron," he concluded.

That decline is discernible in the work force numbers in labor union stories of the Herald in the 1950s. Whereas the plant had more than 100 workers in 1944, the year 1956 saw 30 to 50.

The move to making aluminum furniture and accessories in 1950 appeared to be a game attempt to reinvent the business, but by early 1961 "foundry and machine shop orders were again slow and causing periodic layoffs," the Rutland Herald reported in March 1961. At the time the Herald was announcing the sale of the business and the closing of the foundry. The shutdown was said to have affected just 20-25 men, according to Richard H. Davis, former company president.

Lincoln Iron Works: Workers and Bosses

In 1902 the Lincoln Iron workers went out on strike. John Woodfin was president of the Lincoln Iron Works in 1903. While the source for this story is limited to a satirical account from the Rutland Herald of the time, the tale invites further exploration.

Local history buff Helen Davidson provided the humorous account in her column, "Tidbits From Then and Now," published locally in Sam's Good News.

Taken verbatim from the Herald, the story is told in a mocking style of Woodfin's efforts to get a haircut in the face of a boycott by various local unions. The unions were in sympathy with a strike by the Lincoln Iron workers, going back a year. This was before the time when the United Steelworkers Union became the bargaining unit at Lincoln. As transcribed from the Herald by Helen Davidson, Woodfin "had his haircut, and the job was very well done, too".

"The incident has caused feverish excitement in Rutland, although it is a pretty lively town for Vermont," the story continued. It seems that local barbers had refused to give the Lincoln chief a haircut, in sympathy with the striking iron workers. Someone, perhaps a retired barber,

had defied the boycott, creating the "excitement."

Supposedly other tradesmen had joined in the boycott, including blacksmiths, who wouldn't shoe Woodfin's horses, and teamsters, who would not deliver corn to his place.

"John N. Woodfin has been marooned by sympathetic strikes until he exists by stealth and fears to die, knowing that he could not have a decent funeral and would put his friends to the trouble of walking to the cemetery," the story continued in its soaring irony.

The hyperbole that flavors this account merely whets the appetite for a fuller explanation, which might be found with more digging.

The Rutland Herald's clipping file, "the morgue" to old-time journalists, contains numerous references to labor issues, beginning in 1942, when the clipping file begins for Lincoln Iron Works. No doubt a thorough review of earlier issues would uncover other stories, as Helen Davidson discovered.

In August of 1944, the Herald informs us, the Lincoln Iron operating and maintenance employees voted 63 to 34 to have the United Steelworkers of America, CIO (Congress of Industrial Organizations), represent them. One hundred and three employees were eligible to vote. Observers were John L. Seaver and Walter Costello for the company and John W. Erickson and Edward Fawcette for the union.

Later in the month, John F. Joyce of Baxter Street was elected president of the union at a meeting at the Women's Relief Corps Hall on Merchants Row. (The corps was related to the Grand Army of the Republic, a Civil War organization.)

Besides Joyce, the union elected George Ballard, vice president; Newton Churchill, recording secretary; Walter Cox, treasurer; John Erickson, financial secretary; Romeo Lancour and Edward Fenton, guides; George H. Cox and William C. McDevitt, guards; and Earl Stevens, Ralph Fitzgerald and Arthur J. Hall, trustees.

A month or so later, the Lincoln Iron and Patch plant workers combined forces, with Kenneth Stratton becoming president and John Joyce vice president.

The 1944 Contract

By early December, the union and company had reached a contract agreement, which the Herald reported in 13 1/2 column inches under a prominent two-line headline and subhead. Wage changes were not specifically set, but negotiations on wages were to take place following "settlement by the National War Labor Board of the so-called steel case." Wartime oversight of labor matters was evidently in effect.

The Herald went on to say that a grievance procedure was established, described as unusual in the area. Also, “. . . definite provision is made that learners shall not be paid less than the common labor rate at the plant”.

New employees could be discharged in the first 30 days without arbitration. Seniority would determine promotions and layoffs. Vacation pay ranged from 20 hours for employees with six months of service to one week for a year's service and two weeks for five or more years on the job.

Other clauses in the contract covered hours of work, overtime, holidays and continuance of the company's existing insurance plan. A shop safety committee was established. The company would deduct union dues, and union membership was a condition of continued employment (a “union shop”).

The contract was signed by Richard H. Davis, chief engineer, representing the company. Among those signing for the union were Philip Murray, David J. McDonald, Martin J. Walsh and national and regional officers for the union.

In 1948, a new contract gave the Lincoln work force a 6-cent per hour raise. The union had asked for 30 cents. Two weeks of vacation with pay became standard, and the company granted four paid holidays.

Decertification Attempt

Early 1951 saw an effort to decertify the union, that is, end the Steelworkers Union representation of the workers. The union voiced “strenuous objection.”

Attorney Robert T. Stafford, later governor, congressman and U.S. senator, filed a decertification petition for a group of employees. The petitioners sought to establish a local shop committee with no outside affiliation.

James F. Hanley, union field rep, said the union was “seriously considering” filing a complaint of violation of the Taft-Hartley Act. By April, however, the dispute had been settled and the Steelworkers Union remained the representative for Lincoln workers.

Later in the year, a “wage reopening” clause kicked in, allowing wage negotiations to begin early in 1952. Representing the company in the negotiations as counsel was Milford K. Smith, later a Vermont Supreme Court justice as well as a longtime outdoor columnist for the Herald. By June, a new contract had provided a four percent wage increase, which meant a total of 18 percent since the beginning of 1951.

The starting wage was now 98 cents an hour, with a five-cent increase after 30 days. The contract affected about 70 employees.

The Herald noted that E. Whitcomb Hyde was manager of Lincoln Iron at the time. (The writer knew "Whit" Hyde later as a selectman in Fair Haven and operator of a local machine shop.)

By 1953, the starting wage was up to \$1.08 for the 62 union employees.

A Potpourri of Lincoln Iron Works Products

A 1953 Vermont Life article by Walter Hard Jr. noted the wide diversity of products produced by the Lincoln Iron Works factory.

Though the business would have a scant eight years of life left, Hard's article sounded upbeat: "A typical Vermont foundry business, against the trend to specialization, builds solidly on diversity of products and Vermont workmen's many skills," read the subtitle to the story.

Over its history, the piece noted, ". . . Lincoln's foundries turned out a lot of things — plough shares (though apparently no swords); railroad carriage castings; that antique hunter's dream, the Crescent Coffee Mill; and those gracefully curved iron frames that used to support pupils' desks and seats in countless schools across the country."

Added to Lincoln's own products were ones acquired, including the Wardwell Channeling Machine and the Frenier Sand Pump, both originating in Rutland. Rutland's 1880-81 directory extols Wardwell's stone channeling and quarrying machines as "indisputably the greatest labor-saving machines in the market."

Wholesale distribution of plumbing and heating supplies began at Lincoln Iron in 1900. In the 1950s, the company began making aluminum furniture and accessories.

While Lincoln might not have turned out swords, its war production was important to its own fortunes as well as the war effort.

By 1953, Hard's article noted, Lincoln was mainly a subcontractor, but nimbly switching output to meet current needs. Not so different from when Thomas Ross was touting the company's abilities in the Rutland Directory in 1874-75 as follows: "Proposals made for machinery of every description." Not to mention "steam engines made and repaired," light and heavy castings, derricks, hoisting machines, gearing, pulleys and "shafting of all lengths and sizes."

Another Lincoln enthusiast was Charles E. Crane, who touted the company's products in his Made in Vermont column written for the Herald in August of 1956.

Crane began by noting the export of stoneworking machinery to the far-flung markets of Finland, Sweden and Saudi Arabia.

At the time, Lincoln was also supplying parts for a debarker machine, as well as castings for Jones & Lamson Machine Co. and Bryant Chucking Grinder Co., both of Springfield.

By 1960, diversification at Lincoln included custom kitchens by Crane, along with heating equipment for warm air, steam and hot water systems. The kitchens and other products were offered through dealers, but the Lincoln site included warehouse and display rooms.

Gartners Revive the Property

By the time Allen and Edward Gartner acquired the Lincoln Iron site, comprising about three acres, its days of melting iron were long gone. Still the property proved valuable for the Gartners' Mintzer Brothers building supply business, which had outgrown its space on Strongs Avenue by 1978. The Gartners bought the western portion of the Lincoln site that year.

By this time the site that Lincoln Iron had consolidated had been split, with the Campbell Plumbing & Heating Corp. (later the Northrup Supply Corp.) acquiring the eastern "half" in 1963.

In October of 1982, the Gartners acquired this eastern portion, thus reuniting the main pieces of the Lincoln Iron property.

Mintzer Bros. used the main, machine shop building, a 1952 structure, for storage, both for contracted jobs that Minzer's was supplying and for its store on Strongs Avenue. Mintzer's didn't use the railroad siding on West Street, as it had one on Strongs Avenue.

It is interesting to note that Maurice Mintzer held an interest in Lincoln Industries Inc., which bought the Lincoln Iron Works property in 1964. He was not the Mintzer of the original Mintzer Brothers, though evidently related.

Mintzer Brothers used the wooden building (just east of the large machine shop space that now houses the Winter Farmers Market) for storage of kitchen cabinets. Before the Gartners bought it, this space had served as a Coca Cola Bottling Co. warehouse, following occupancy by the Campbell Wholesale Plumbing & Heating Corp. in the 1960s and '70s.

The smaller, white clapboard building, easternmost of the remaining three structures along West Street, and the red-painted brick building attached to its rear, were used for the Mintzer's kitchen and bath showroom. The two buildings appear on the 1925 Sanborn Insurance Map of Rutland but not on the 1916 map, thus dating them to the early part of the last century.

The Gartners sold their business to LaValley Building Supply of Newport, N.H., in 2001. What had been the Mintzers operation was consolidated to the site on South Main Street in Rutland Town that LaValley's occupies today.

The Gartners continued to use the West Street property for storage rentals, but the buildings were prone to freelance use by transients. Fires destroyed two of the buildings, which were not insured.

The Gartners sold the approximately three acres they held of the Lincoln Iron site in July 2012 for \$439,500 to the Vermont Farmers Market Education Center, otherwise known as the Vermont Farmers Food Center. The Gartners agreed to finance the project themselves and postpone the first payment until the Winter Farmers Market was under way.

To considerable fanfare, the market opened Nov. 3, 2012, after much clearing out, cleaning up and restoration work by volunteers and contractors.

Ambitious plans for the future involve the Vermont Foodbank opening a regional hub in the main building. Food, nutrition and cooking classes are on the Vermont Farmers Food Center agenda, as well as food festivals and other agriculture-related events.

Leaders plan a "food aggregation and storage" facility for local farmers and space for donations of fresh food for the needy. A commercial kitchen and food-related job training are among other plans.

A Fiery Finish

Once Mintzer Brothers sold to LaValley Building Supply in 2001, activity at the property dropped off. Whereas a Mintzer's worker had been on the site daily, that was no longer the case, though some space was still used for storage.

Rutland Fire Department records show two major and two smaller fires at the site from 2004 to 2009.

Along with the financial loss went much of the historic structure of Lincoln Iron Works. Use of the buildings by transients was blamed for at least three of the fires, and all seemed to have had a human cause.

Most recently, on April 18, 2009, fire destroyed the brick structure on the west side of the West Street site. This seems to have been an early building, perhaps the original foundry, running northward from a retaining wall. The low retaining wall borders a path that connects Baxter Street below to West Street.

Greg Cox, who had occasion to visit the property before the purchase of the site by the Food Center (whose board he heads), described the



April, 18, 2009, fire at the Lincoln Iron Works.



Rubble remaining after April 18, 2009, fire at the Lincoln Iron Works.

brick structure as a beautiful building. Bruce Utley, a Baxter Street resident living across from the site, said the building was "pretty fancy," with arched or rounded windows.

The evening fire was reported about 7 p.m. and quickly led to a general alarm. By 8 p.m. the building had collapsed. Two vagrants thought to have been inside the building later reported to the police station.

Interestingly enough, an article in the April 22nd Rutland Herald, quoted a state police fire investigator as saying the cause of the fire appeared to be of human origin but apparently not caused by squatters who were living there.

Rutland City Fire Department Deputy Chief Fran Robillard noted that many pallets of brick were salvaged after the fire. A few odd bricks remain scattered around the site.

In the other major fire, a connection with homeless squatters was speculated on but not confirmed, at least in available accounts. The fire occurred Dec. 29, 2004, in a long, one-story building running east and west behind the buildings that occupy the front of the property today. The building was known to be frequented by squatters.

A Rutland Herald account placed an estimate of damage from a state police fire investigator at \$500,000. The investigator said there were "a couple of RVs in there," one of them "huge," along with a pontoon boat and three cars.

Two other fires occurred, one on July 14, 2007, and one on July 25, 2008. Firemen reported that the earlier fire occurred in a small out-building where a homeless individual "must have been sleeping within."

"Apparently, this individual ignited papers on the floor of this structure with his cigarette." The homeless man was identified and evidently escaped serious injury.

The July 25, 2008, fire was in a guard shack at the property but was extinguished by the person who reported the fire. Passing by on his bicycle, the man reportedly put out the small fire with a bottle of water.

Timeline of the Lincoln Iron Works Site

1868 — Thomas Ross establishes the Lincoln Iron Works on West Street, just west of the West Street Cemetery.

1881 — Thomas Ross is killed in a shop accident Jan. 5 by an exploding emery wheel. Out of respect, "banks, stores and business places generally in the village were closed during the funeral exercises." His remains are buried in Evergreen Cemetery. Survivors included his wife, Eleanor.

1882 — Stock company acquires Lincoln Iron Works and begins to increase production.

1886 — Lincoln Iron now employs 60 people. Redfield Proctor is president.

1900 — Lincoln establishes a subsidiary branch for wholesale distribution of plumbing and heating supplies.

1950 — Lincoln Iron establishes aluminum foundry.

1952 — Lincoln Iron Works announces construction of a \$50,000 machine shop, 140 by 65 feet, one story but high enough to accommodate overhead cranes. This is the building that now houses the Winter Farmers Market.

1956 — Lincoln Iron Works buys land and buildings at 245 West St. from Kinsman & Mills Inc., planning to house its plumbing and heating business. The Rutland Herald described Kinsman & Mills as one of the oldest New England monumental firms. The sale comprised about a half-acre of land and three buildings next to West Street Cemetery.

1961 — Lincoln Iron Works is sold to Jerome S. Jennings, "a New York City financier." Foundry is shut down. The foundry and machine shop had been "operating for some time on a skeleton staff," according to the Rutland Herald.

1963 — Lincoln Iron Works sells the eastern portion of the West Street site to Campbell Plumbing & Heating Corp. of Glens Falls, N.Y.

1964 — More Lincoln Iron Works property is sold to Lincoln Industries. Included are the western portion of the main parcel along West Street, a parking lot on the west side of Baxter Street, and 22 lots on the north end of Baxter Street that the company owned. William I. Ginsburg, Maurice J. Mintzer and Ronald A. Fucci are named as buyers in the city land records.

1965 — General Electric Co. establishes Plant No. 5 as the Forge Shop on the Lincoln Industries property, producing forgings from titanium and other metals.

1965 — Grossman Industrial Properties buys parcel of land on Baxter Street from Lincoln Industries.

1971 — What remains of Lincoln Iron Works is merged with Marvin Watch Corp., a New York corporation. The merged entity is called the "Marvin Corp." It is uncertain just what had remained of Lincoln Iron Works at the time. The bulk of its property appeared to have been sold off, as indicated in the transactions cited above in 1963 and 1964.

1975 — General Electric Plant No. 5 operations are moved from the West Street site to the new G.E. plant on Windcrest Road in Rutland Town.

1977 — Coca Cola Bottling Co. occupies building at the former Lincoln Iron site for use as a warehouse. The building was part of the property that had been sold to Campbell Plumbing & Heating Corp.

1978 — Coca Cola moves warehouse from West Street to an industrial shell building in Rutland Town.

1978 — Allen and Edward Gartner purchase the western portion of the Lincoln Iron Works property on West Street from Lincoln Industries Inc., successor to the Lincoln Iron Works, to serve the needs of their Mintzer Brothers building supply store, based on Strongs Avenue.

1982 — The Gartners purchase the eastern portion of the old Lincoln Iron site from a subsidiary of the Campbell Plumbing and Heating Corp., which had become Northrup Supply Corp.

2001 — The Gartners sell Mintzer Brothers, though not the Lincoln Iron site, to the LaValley company of Newport, N.H. This ends the role of the old Lincoln Iron Works property in the building supply business.

July 5, 2012 — Allen and Edward Gartner sell their three-acre former Lincoln Iron Works site to the Vermont Farmers Market Education Center Inc., a non-profit organization also known as the Vermont Farmers Food Center.

Nov. 3, 2012 — Rutland's Winter Farmers Market opens in the former Lincoln Iron Works machine shop following several months of work by volunteers and contractors.

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More to Tell?

The author spent many hours tracking down leads to the Lincoln Iron Works history, but there is always more information to be had. If, kind reader, you have more to tell than is contained here, please feel free to contact Jack Crowther, 29 Giorgetti Blvd., Rutland, VT 05701, (802) 775-1182, or jack_cr2@yahoo.com.



Pouring molten metal at the Lincoln Iron Works.



Opening Day at the Winter Farmers Market at the Lincoln Iron site.